

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ASUNCION 0723

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, PA
SUBJ: OFFICIAL RESULTS OF THE 1978 GENERAL ELECTIONS

REF: A) ASUNCION 604; B) ASUNCION 599

1. SUMMARY: PARAGUAY'S FEBRUARY 12 GENERAL ELECTIONS WERE NEITHER FREE NOR DEMOCRATIC. RATHER THEY PRESENTED FURTHER EVIDENCE OF THE COLORADO PARTY'S INTENTION TO RETAIN FULL TOTALITARIAN CONTROL OVER THE POLITICAL LIFE OF PARAGUAY. AS EXPECTED, THE OFFICIAL RESULTS SHOW PRESIDENN SR.ESSNER AND THE COLORADO PARTY RECEIVING A SOME-WHAT HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE THAN IN THE 1973 GENERAL ELECTIONS.

BUT LESS THAN 90 PER CENT. THE RADICAL LIBERALS' VOTE SUPPOSEDLY DECREASED CONSIDERABLY WHILE THE LIBERALS, REPORTEDLY WITH OFFICIAL HELP, WERE GRANTED A LARGER SHARE OF THE VOTE THAN IN THE PAST. FRAUDULENT BALLOTING PRACTICES, OBSERVED BY EMBASSY OFFICERS, WERE VERY EVIDENT ON ELECTION DAY. THE OFFICIAL RESULTS APPEAR TO BE FICTITIOUS, SINCE THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION AND ITS AGENTS DOCTORED THEM EXTENSIVELY. NEITHER OPPOSITION PARTY HAS INDICATED ANY PLANS TO CHALLENGE THE ELECTION RESULTS OR PRACTICES, A LOSING PROPOSITION IN ANY CASE AS THE RULING PARTY CONTROLS THE ELECTION COMMISSION AND THE COURTS TO WHICH ANY APPEAL WOULD BE MADE. IN FACT, THE LIBERALS CLAIM THEY ARE HAPPY HAVING INCREASED THEIR STRENGTH SUPPOSEDLY AT THE EXPENSE OF THE
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RADICALS. THE PARAGUAYAN CITIZENRY FOLLOWED ALL THIS WITH IN-DIFFERENCE, KNOWING THE RESULTS WERE FOREORDAINED AND BEING MAINLY INTERESTED IN GETTING THEIR CIVIC CARDS STAMPED, AS REQUIRED BY LAW. HAD THE ELECTION BEEN FREE, STROESSNER WOULD HAVE WON ANYWAY. END SUMMARY.

2. THE FEBRUARY 12 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN PARAGUAY WERE NIETHER

FREE NOR DEMOCRATIC, DESPITE PRESIDENT STROESSNER'S PROUD CLAIM THAT THEY WERE CARRIED OUT UNDER THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY. RATHER, THEY PROVIDE THE MOST RECENT AND OBVIOUS EXAMPLE OF THE COLORADO PARTY'S INTENTION OF MAINTAINING TOTALITARIAN CONTROL OVER THE POLITICAL LIFE OF PARAGUAY. THE RULING PARTY'S ABILITY TO MANIPULATE THE VOTING PROCESS SO THAT IT COULD CONTROL ALMOST ALL OF THE BALLOTS CAST DEMONSTRATES THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE OPPOSITION HAS BEEN ROUTED. IT ALSO DEMONSTRATES HOW THE ELECTION COMMISSION, ESTABLISHED BY LAW TO ENSURE FAIR ELECTIONS, IS INSTEAD USED TO SERVE THE COLORADO PARTY'S ENDS.

3. THE ELECTION COMMISSION FINALLY PUBLISHED OFFICIAL ELECTION RESULTS FEBRUARY 16, THREE DAYS LATER THAN THE TIME THE PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION HAD EARLIER ASSURED AN EMBASSY OFFICER THE RESULTS WOULD BE AVAILABLE. THE OFFICIAL RESULTS WERE (RESULTS OF 1973 GENERAL ELECTIONS ARE GIVEN IN PARENTHESES): COLORADO PARTY-89.62 PERCENT (83.64); RADICAL LIBERAL PARTY-5.44 PERCENT (12.04); LIBERAL PARTY-3.66 PERCENT (3.02). THE BREAKDOWN OF SEATS IN PARLIAMENT HAS BEEN ALTERED WITH LIBERALS GAINING AND RADICAL LIBERALS LOSING. THE COLORADOS STAY AT 20 SENATE SEATS AND 40 SEATS IN THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, THE TWO-THIRDS ALLOWED THE MAJORITY PARTY UNDER THE CONSTITUTION. THE RADICAL LIBERALS DROP TO SIX SENATE SEATS AND TWELVE IN THE CHAMBER FROM THE EIGHT AND SIXTEEN PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED. THE LIBERALS INCREASE TO FOUR SENATE AND EIGHT CHAMBER SEATS FROM TWO AND

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FOUR RESPECTIVELY.

4. IT WAS NOT A FREE ELECTION. FROM COLORADO PARTY SOURCES WE HAVE WORD THAT THE COLORADOS, THROUGH VARIOUS FRAUDULENT PRACTICES WERE ABLE TO CONTROL 99 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. THEIR ONLY PROBLEM AFTERWARDS WAS TO ENSURE THAT THEIR OFFICIAL MARGIN WAS BELOW 90 PERCENT SO THAT THE RESULTS WOULD NOT APPEAR TOO BLATANTLY ONE-SIDED. THEY ALSO HAD TO DECIDE HOW TO SPLIT THE REMAINDER OF THE VOTE AMONG THE TWO OPPOSITION PARTIES, AND HOW TO APPORTION THE ONE THIRD OF THE CONGRESS RESERVED FOR THE LOSERS.

5. INDICATIONS OF FINAGLING WITH THE ACTUAL VOTE ARE NUMEROUS. TO CITE ONLY ONE EXAMPLE: ACCORDING TO THE AMERICAN WIFE OF AN OFFICIAL AT ONE OF THE BALLOTING PLACES (WHERE NO OPPOSITION OBSERVERS WERE PRESENT) THE TOTAL BALLOT COUNT WAS 7,000 COLORADO, 10 RADICAL AND ONE LIBERAL. THE OFFICIAL AND HIS COLORADO ASSOCIATES ARBITRARILY CHANGED THE TOTALS IN FAVOR OF THE OPPOSITION, GIVEN THE RADICALS 700 AND THE LIBERALS 100, "TO AVOID EMBARRASSMENT."

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ASUNCION 0723

6. THE LIBERALS, WHOSE CURRENT OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED LEADERSHIP IS OBSEQUIOUSLY AND CONSPICUOUSLY SUBSERVIENT TO THE GOP, WERE REWARDED WITH A HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE THAN THEY HAD GARNERED SINCE 1968. THIS IN SPITE OF A MAJOR PARTY SPLIT LAST YEAR.

7. FRAUDULENT PRACTICES AT THE POLLING PLACES WERE READILY APPARENT. THREE EMBASSY OFFICERS EACH VISITED APPROXIMATELY TEN SEPARATE POLLING PLACES, BOTH IN ASUNCION AND IN THE COUNTRY, WHERE THE NUMBER OF BALLOT BOXES VARIED FROM ABOUT 20 TO 110. THEIR OBSERVATIONS, SUPPORTED BY CASUAL OBSERVATION BY OTHER EMBASSY OFFICERS AND COMMENTS FROM PARAGUAYAN FRIENDS AND EMBASSY EMPLOYEES (BOTH COLORADOS AND OPPOSITIONISTS) PRODUCES THE FOLLOWING LIST OF IRREGULARITIES:

- (A) ALMOST WITHOUT EXCEPTION, THE BALLOTS OF ONE OR BOTH OPPOSITION PARTIES, BUT USUALLY THE RADICAL LIBERAL BALLOT, WERE NOT AVAILABLE IN THE VOTING BOOTH (PIEZA OBSCURA).
- (B) COLORADO PARTY BALLOTS WERE AVAILABLE AND ON DISPLAY NEXT TO THE BALLOT BOX.
- (C) NOWHERE WAS THE PIEZA OBSCURA IN USE ACCORDING TO LAW, MAKING A SECRET BALLOT IMPOSSIBLE.
- (D) PRESIDENTS OF SOME BALLOT BOXES HANDED THE COLORADO PARTY

BALLOT TO THE VOTER WITH THE BALLOT ENVELOPE AND TOLD THE VOTER TO DEPOSIT IT IN THE BALLOT BOX.

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(E) OPPOSITION OBSERVERS WERE NOT PRESENT AT ALL BALLOT BOXES,

AS REQUIRED BY LAW.

(F) SEALS WERE MISSING FROM SOME OF THE BALLOT BOXES OUTSIDE ASUNCION.

8. THE DIRECTORATE OF THE RADICAL LIBERAL PARTY (PLR) ISSUED A MANIFESTO PUBLISHED IN THE FEBRUARY 19 "ABC" DECLARING THAT THE ELECTIONS WERE FRAUDULENT, WITHOUT GOING INTO ANY SPECIFIC DETAILS. THE STATEMENT DID NOT INDICATE THAT THE PLR PLANNED TO MOUNT ANY LEGAL CHALLENGE TO THE RESULTS, HOWEVER. ANY CHALLENGE WOULD BE DOOMED FROM THE START SINCE THE GOVERNMENT CONTROLS BOTH THE ELECTION COMMISSION WHICH WOULD HEAR THE CHALLENGE AND THE COURTS WHICH WOULD DECIDE ANY APPEAL OF THE COMMISSION'S FINDINGS. THE LIBERALS TYPICALLY ISSUED A STATEMENT THAT THERE WERE NO IRREGULARITIES AND THAT THE RESULTS REPRESENTED A MINOR VICTORY FOR THEM.

9. COMMENT: PARAGUAYANS FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE WERE AWARE THAT THE ELECTION RESULTS HAD BEEN DECIDED BEFORE THEY WENT TO THE POLLS. IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT MOST OF THOSE WHO VOTED DID SO INDIFFERENTLY AND WITH THE CHIEF PURPOSE OF GETTING THEIR VOTER IDENTIFICATION CARDS STAMPED, AS REQUIRED BY LAW, AND TO AVOID FUTURE PROBLEMS WITH THE AUTHORITIES (OR THE FAIRLY STIFF FINES IMPOSED FOR NOT VOTING). WHERE COLORADOS WERE CONCERNED,

VOTING PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY TO PROVE THEIR PARTY LOYALTY HOWEVER CYNICAL THE ACT MIGHT BE.

10. THAT SAID, IT SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED THAT IF THE GOP ALLOWED A GENUINELY OPEN ELECTION TO TAKE PLACE, THE COLORADOS WOULD DOUBTLESS OBTAIN A CLEAR MAJORITY - AT LEAST THE FIRST TIME AROUND, BECAUSE OF STROESSNER'S POPULARITY AND THE LACK OF ANY VIABLE
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